

Comments for Ag Vision
California Department of Food and Agriculture

Secretary Kawamura and Board members

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts.

The majority of society perceives “Nature” as a domain, something with perceived boundaries, a thing or place that is distinct which requires preservation by Civilization due to perceived values. This perception continues that Agriculture (which is likely to be antagonistic to Nature) is a subset of Civilization. With this kind of thinking, Resources must be used to support Civilization (and Agriculture) in order to preserve Nature. Because Resources are limited, much concern exists over which entity gets to use these resources and further, whether their use renders them unusable for others. This view of the world is not sustainable. It has created a disconnect and tension between society and Agriculture. We must move to a new perspective. This perspective would be one where Civilization is at the apex and that which must be sustained. Agriculture is the only thing that can sustain Civilization. Agriculture must make wise decisions as Ecosystem Processes are manipulated in order to sustain Civilization. With this perspective, resource management moves from an arena of project formulation to one of inherent behavior manifested by the understanding of ecosystem function. We must move from addressing symptoms and rather work to understand basic underlying problems as we create strategies for the future.

Humans make decisions which lead to their futures. In his book, *Collapse*, Jared Diamond revealed that a universal cause of civilization failure was the inability to make sound decisions. This would suggest that in order to have a civilization as sustained by agriculture, we must consider that our decision making is flawed and that a new process must find its way into our thinking. Ours is an approach led by the philosophies of Descartes, which is one of parts-based, hard system thinking. We believe that if we understand the parts – we can understand the whole. However, as people like Margaret Wheatley and other systems thinkers have discovered, the future lies in understanding the relationships rather than the parts. We must get beyond narrow disciplines in our education and embrace the world of relationships between all living and non-living components of our biosphere. We must restore the relationships of agriculture and society.

Donella Meadows, one of the great systems thinkers, created a list of “levers” which could be used to move or change a system. The easiest and least effective levers to use are things like numbers (fines, rewards, etc.). The hardest and most effective levers would be to change paradigms. Agriculture must change paradigms. We must understand that we are simply moving solar energy through living systems in order to sustain civilization. We must do this in such a way as to allow the living systems of which we are a part to reproduce and perpetuate themselves. We must help society to shift paradigms such that agriculture is viewed as that which sustains civilization rather than an activity which is in competition for resources.

Agriculture in 2030 will have far shorter food chains. Agriculture in 2030 will be carbon neutral – we will sequester as much carbon as we release. Agriculture in 2030 will be recognized and compensated for sustaining ecosystem health. Agriculture in 2030 will rely more on human

energy and less on fossil fuel energy. Agriculture in 2030 will be attractive as a way of life for future generations. A failure to approach this type of vision will ensure domestic stress, leading to economic decline and social breakdown.

Therefore, the challenge is to achieve paradigm shift. What we “must have” is a deeply held commitment at all levels of governance to work towards that paradigm shift. This must exist through our educational system, K-12 and beyond, it must exist in our regulatory framework, it must exist in the legislative arena at all levels, and it must start by example from the focal point – the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

Thank you for considering my remarks.

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